United Nations A/53/1039

General Assembly

Distr.: General
19 August 1999
English
Original: French

Fifty-third session
Agenda item 146
Status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts

Letter dated 13 August 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to bring to your attention the statement issued by the Presidency of the European Union on 12 August 1999 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 146.

(*Signed*) Marjatta **Rasi**
Permanent Representative of
Finland to the United Nations

99-24035 (E) 200899 200899

Annex

[Original: English and French]

Statement issued by the Presidency of the European Union on 12 August 1999 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the four Geneva Conventions, the European Union recalls the primary importance that it attaches to the four Geneva Conventions as the basic treaties of international humanitarian law.

The anniversary of the four Geneva conventions is a time to take stock and to promote the implementation of international humanitarian law in all armed conflicts. The States members of the Union seize this opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to respecting and promoting international humanitarian law.

The Conventions were a major step forward in the development of humanitarian law and an impetus for the subsequent development of an impressive body of international instruments. The Conventions are as necessary today as they were 50 years ago and the Union stresses the importance of full compliance with the provisions of the Conventions.

The Conventions were drawn up solely for the protection of the individual in times of armed conflict. As such they represent the basis of the principles of humanity and together with the Additional Protocols of 1977 they are the main instruments of humanitarian law. The Union calls upon all countries that have not yet done so to become parties to the Geneva Conventions as well as to all major treaties in the humanitarian field.

Respect for, and protection and humane treatment of, the victims of armed conflicts are the main duties of the parties to the Conventions. The implementation of the provisions of the Conventions is of paramount importance. The Union recognizes the achievements since the adoption of the Geneva Conventions. However, the Union deplores the persistent violations of humanitarian law. In today's conflicts the important distinctions between combatants and civilians have often become blurred; the safety of humanitarian workers is not respected and children and other vulnerable groups have become targets of the conflicts.

Bridging the widening gap between existing international norms and respect for them should be the main objective and the issue should be put more forcefully on the agenda of the international community.

Prosecution of violations of international humanitarian law is an important means to promote compliance with the Conventions. In this context the Union welcomes the adoption of the Statute of a permanent International Criminal Court to try the most serious crimes and violations of humanitarian law and calls for early ratification of that Statute.

The Union pledges its continuing appreciation and support to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The role of ICRC in ensuring that humanitarian rules are respected is vital. The work that ICRC has carried out over the years in very difficult circumstances is impressive. The ICRC anniversary publication *People on War*, on the experiences of both combatants and civilians, is timely and one way to promote knowledge of international humanitarian law.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the national societies and many other groups and individuals have worked and are working for the

promotion of international humanitarian law, and the Union pays tribute to their courageous actions.

The Union recalls also the important role of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian law and notes in particular that international humanitarian law has been an important topic during the United Nations Decade of International Law.